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# The Sources of Romanesque Sculpture

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**F**RENCH Romanesque sculpture develops in three periods: a primitive period corresponding roughly to the first quarter of the twelfth century; a second phase marked by baroque exaggeration during which the prevailing styles are those of Languedoc and Burgundy, covering the second third of the century; and lastly the style of Ile-de-France, which assimilates and refines the eccentricities of Languedoc and Burgundy, reduces the figure to a logical harmony with Gothic architecture, and finally supplants the older styles throughout the whole of France.

This paper aims to show the influence of manuscript illumination on the first two phases of Romanesque. Such an influence has already been suggested for the second, or baroque phase, and indeed it is hardly possible to deny it when one compares such a figure as the prophet of Souillac (Pl. I, fig. 1), a fair example of the developed style of Languedoc, with the pen drawings of manuscripts of the eleventh century (Pl. I, fig. 2). The contortion of the body, the whirling draperies, the restless stance, the deep undercutting which provides a rhythm of light and shade, together with the general resemblance of the figure to the angel in the miniature who locks the gate of Hell—all show a remarkable surrender on the part of the sculptor of plastic values in return for those of line and color. The same pictorial style is found in the Burgundian work of Vézelay; here we have sometimes the lyric line of Languedoc, and sometimes a contrast of broadly hatched and lighted surfaces with deep holes of shadow which produces the effect of a painted miniature.

It seems to me therefore that Mr. A. Kingsley Porter, who tells us in a recent article on Romanesque

sculpture that "archaeology has been unable to account" for this pictorial style in Burgundy and Languedoc, is making mediaeval art more mysterious than need be. This and other phenomena of mediaeval style become intelligible when viewed in the light of one fact that is gradually becoming recognized, viz., that the guiding influence in the evolution of mediaeval art was always the manuscript illumination.

The chief alternative theory as to the source of Romanesque sculpture is that which would derive the style from ivory carving. The theory has in its favor that the ivories represent about all we have in the way of a consistent practice of sculpture in the period preceding the twelfth century, and would therefore afford a natural starting point for the enterprising stone sculptors of the Romanesque period. But one finds on investigation that the style of the ivories does not explain in all respects that of the carvings in stone.

Take for example an early Languedoc work, the Christ on the choir screen of St. Sernin at Toulouse (Pl. II, fig. 3). If we compare this figure with the Christ of an ivory plaque in the Museum at Orléans (Pl. II, fig. 4), the resemblance of structure is indeed striking; both figures show peculiar, undulating locks of hair, a grotesque pot-belly, and lack of articulation between the torso and the legs. There is one thing however which the ivory lacks, and it happens that this one thing is the most characteristic feature of Languedoc sculpture early and late, viz., the double lines that divide the drapery into a semblance of overlapping folds. But if we turn to a late Carolingian manuscript of the school of Tours, we find in the figure of the evangelist Mark (Pl. II, fig. 5) a fair parallel to the relief of St. Sernin in hair, pot-belly, and unattached legs; and we also find the essential double lines in the drapery which mark the technique of the stone sculptor, as well.

In fact, the more one studies mediaeval ivories, the more one is struck by their imitative character. We find in them the reflection, not the genesis of style. The Carolingian ivories are mostly copies, either of

late classic works in the same material, or of contemporary manuscripts. In a plaque at Zurich, (Pl. III, fig. 6), for example, we find an abbreviated replica of the illustration of Psalm XXVII as it appears in the Utrecht Psalter (Pl. III, fig. 7). The same relation to manuscripts is evident in the later ivory-styles, and while, of course, we seldom get so close an imitation as in the case just illustrated, the parallel between the mother art and the ivory imitations is so close that Goldschmidt in his recent work on the ivories of the ninth and tenth centuries was able to classify them entirely on the basis of the manuscript schools whose styles they follow. The ivories, then, so far from being the models of the stone sculptors, are better considered as the coördinate offspring of the mother-art of miniature painting.

And, really, when one comes to think of what comprised the artistic stock-in-trade of these Romanesque sculptors, it is clear that their visualizations must have been determined mostly by the illuminations of the manuscripts. The number of ivories preserved in the monasteries of the twelfth century could not have been large. Ivories are not easily destroyed; and yet how few are known to antedate the twelfth century! Manuscripts, on the other hand, and illuminated ones at that, were everywhere at hand; as Beissel says, the smallest church could not conduct its services with less than three—a Psalter, a Gospel Book, and a Sacramentary. It seems to me, therefore, that a derivation of Romanesque sculpture from the manuscript styles is to be predicated from the general conditions surrounding the rise of Romanesque art, even if direct proof were not forthcoming. We have already seen that the figure style of Languedoc shows the influence of pen-drawing to an extent that cannot be due to coincidence.

Attention may now be called to the relation of a certain style of illumination with another phase of Romanesque sculpture, which appears in France in early works of Burgundy and the valley of the Loire, but is best known in its Italian variant, where it goes under the name of Lombard.

To make this relation clear, I must first ask you to consider for a moment the evolution of illumination up to the twelfth century. In the Carolingian period we have a number of schools, more or less distinguishable, but toward its close these various schools begin to coalesce into two main artistic currents. One of these is represented by the famous Utrecht Psalter (Pl. III, fig. 7), whose illuminator, however much he was indebted to classic models, succeeded in transforming them to the point of producing something never seen before. His style, in fact, marks the beginning of modern art in that it introduces as a prime factor for the first time that emotional element which distinguishes the modern from the classic. His pages are swept by feeling; every figure, even if conceived as standing still, is yet galvanized into a sort of ecstatic pirouette by swirling drapery. When movement is represented, the action becomes violent; the heads are thrust forward from the shoulders with an earnestness that is grotesque and yet convincing; even the ground-line heaves and rolls in the general hurricane of emotion.

This style, centering at first in what we call the school of Reims, gradually draws into its scope the other schools of France—the Franco-Saxon school, the school of Tours, and the school of Corbie—losing in the meantime some of its freedom and casting its expressive movement into more conventional moulds. By the eleventh century it dominates the drawing of France and England, reaching a high grade of freshness and originality in the island kingdom, while in France, and particularly in Northern France, we find it more soberly employed as in a Gospel of the Library at Boulogne or in the *Liber Vitae* (Pl. I, fig. 2). It always retains, however, its qualities of expressiveness and of restless line, and these we have seen that it communicated to the developed styles of Romanesque sculpture in Languedoc and Burgundy.

The other style began in the Carolingian period in what we call the Ada group of manuscripts, so called after a putative sister of Charlemagne for whom one of the manuscripts of the group was written. This

style, developing under the patronage of a court whose worship of the late classic was fanatic, not only tries to reproduce the letter of its models, but makes a desperate attempt to reach the spirit as well (Pl. IV, fig. 8). The result is that, as time goes on, it swings away from the linear style of Reims and of the Utrecht Psalter, and evolves a plastic quality that is not at all unlike the late classic and proto-Byzantine models that it strove to imitate. Thus in phases like that illustrated by the Codex Egberti (Pl. IV, fig. 9) we find pictures much resembling proto-Byzantine manuscripts of the sixth century, and there is always in the style a lack of movement in figure and drapery, a flatness in the treatment of planes, a heaviness of proportions, which contrast sharply with the exuberant calligraphy of the drawings we have seen in the Utrecht Psalter (Pl. III, fig. 7) and its descendants. A definite peculiarity may be found also in the curious flapper-like feet, on which the figures try to stand.

This style developed in the valley of the Rhine. Just where its center was in the 9th century we do not know, but in the tenth it lay in the abbey of Reichenau on Lake Constance, whence it spread in the course of the eleventh century throughout the monasteries of Germany, and also into the Low Countries, where it met and made some curious mixtures with the linear style of France and England. In the twelfth century it followed the route of trade and political relations from Germany into North Italy, for there can be little doubt, it seems to me, that in this German style of illumination we have the source of Lombard sculpture. Guglielmus, who tells the story of Genesis with such crude power on the façade of Modena cathedral (Pl. IV, fig. 10), his pupil Nicholas, and all the rest of the school down to Benedetto Antellami of the end of the twelfth century, show in all their work the same heavy figures, the same flapper feet, the same reserve in movement, the same formula of drapery, the same adherence to plane instead of line—in a word, the same plastic quality that differentiates their work from the sculp-

ture of Languedoc and Burgundy that inherited the lyric movement of the linear style of illumination.

The plastic style is not confined to North Italy. It made its way into Eastern France, and we find it established in Burgundy at a date before the creation of the linear style of Vézelay. Its best example here is found in the choir capitals of St. Martin d'Ainay at Lyons, which date from the consecration of the church in 1106. Here we find the same adherence to plane, and the same crude and heavy figure style, albeit with a certain French accent, which one finds also in the sculptures of Guglielmus. But as we pass to the capitals of the nave, evidently by a later hand, we are already in the presence of the leaf-work, the undercutting, the long faces with drilled pupils, and the general coloristic effect of Vézelay. In this one church, therefore, one can see the passing of the German style and the entry of the new Burgundian sculpture.

The plastic style extended also down the valley of the Loire and left examples in many early capitals of this region, as well as in later examples like those from Ile-Bouchard. Not much of it is found in France, because most of the Romanesque churches received their decoration in the middle of the twelfth century, when the new lyric art of Languedoc and Burgundy had given more adequate expression to the emotion which filled the soul of proto-Gothic France. It may be, in fact, that the rare examples of the style are due to itinerant Lombard workmen, and that the style was an importation into France from North Italy. In any case, its ultimate source seems to me to have been the miniatures of the Rhine.

To test the accuracy of this derivation, I asked a graduate student, Mr. Robert O'Connor, to trace the history of a motif of ornament which happens to be peculiar to the Romanesque sculpture of the regions just mentioned, i. e., North Italy and the valley of the Loire. Mr. O'Connor's results will be published shortly, and I shall here only allude to that portion of his work which affects our problem. The value of the motif as a test lies in the fact that for an ornamental motif its use is unusually circumscribed. It never appears in

sculpture till the twelfth century, and then only in the regions mentioned, being absent from the ornamental alphabet of Normandy, England, and Languedoc, and never occurring in the ivories. But in Burgundy and the valley of the Loire it is very popular in the twelfth century, and all the Lombard sculptors use it, both early and late, and everywhere they go; I found one example in some Lombard work in Dalmatia. It is a variation of the double-axe motif sometimes found in Roman mosaics, and is very obviously not a natural invention for a stone-carver. Guglielmus uses it as a convention for water (Pl. IV, fig. 10), but its commonest employment is as a decoration for colonnettes, as is the case at Bourges.

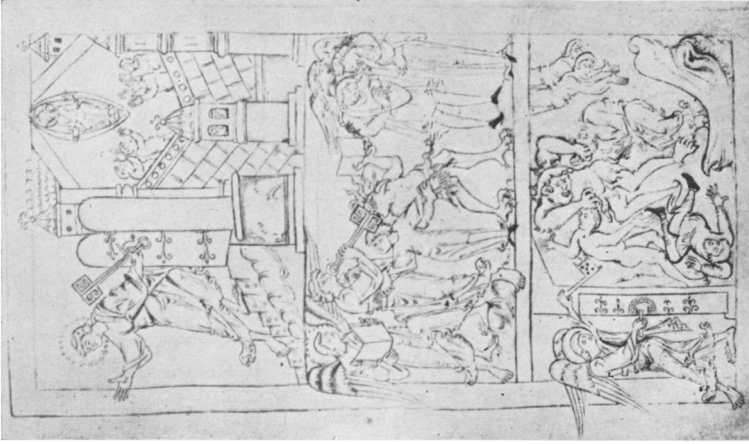
Now when Mr. O'Connor undertook to trace the ornament back to its source, the path led him immediately into illumination and nowhere else. In illumination, moreover, the ornament is confined to the Rhenish style (Pl. IV, fig. 8) in the eleventh and tenth centuries, and he finally found its mediaeval starting point in the miniatures of the Ada-group of manuscripts, wherein we found the ultimate source of the Lombard figure style.

The sources, then, of the two most important styles of Romanesque sculpture, the linear style of Burgundy and Languedoc and the plastic style of the Lombard school, are to be sought in the two dominant styles of illumination which these Romanesque sculptors knew, the one prevailing in France and England, a linear style, expressive and baroque, the other flourishing in the valley of the Rhine, and retaining in its self-contained figures a remnant of classic form. This is all my note is intended to convey, save perhaps that it may serve to show the importance of the study of illumination for any real understanding of mediaeval styles. Illumination is the only art that has a continuous evolution throughout the Middle Ages; architecture often fails us, fresco-painting has huge gaps in its history, figure sculpture in stone is a lost art for whole centuries and is often sadly to seek in the ivories, but the illuminated book is always there to bridge the gaps. To paraphrase a good old Latin tag: "*littera picta manet.*"





*Fig. 1*—SOUILLAC, CHURCH:  
PROPHET.



*Fig. 2*—LONDON, BRIT. MUS.: LIBER VITAE.



*Fig. 3*—TOULOUSE, ST. SER-  
NIN: CHRIST.



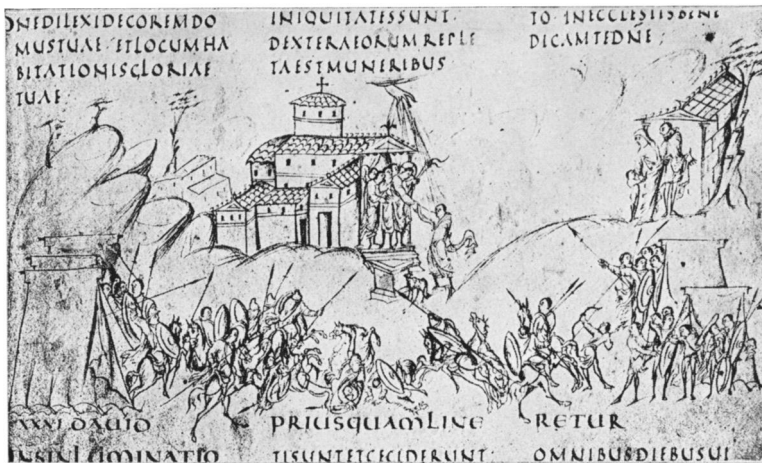
*Fig. 4*—ORLÉANS, MUSEUM:  
CHRIST.



*Fig. 5*—PARIS, BIBL. NAT.: ST. MARK.



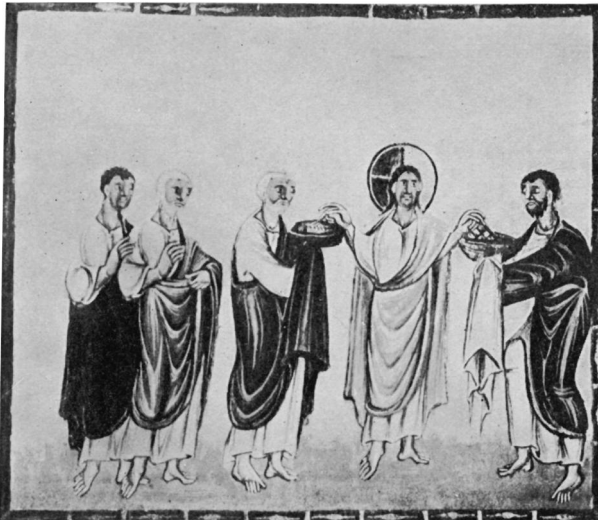
*Fig. 6*—ZURICH, NATIONAL MUSEUM:  
IVORY PLAQUE.



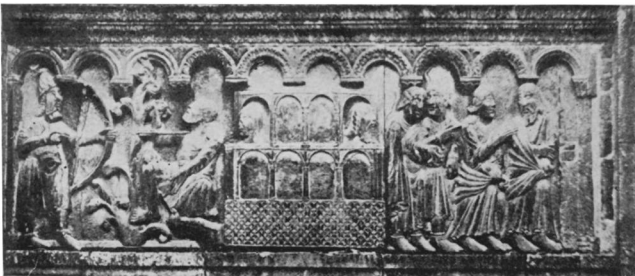
*Fig. 7*—UTRECHT, UNIVERSITY LIBRARY: UTRECHT PSALTER.



*Fig. 8*—HEIDELBERG, UNIVERSITY LIBRARY: SACRAMENTARY.



*Fig. 9*.—TREVES, CITY LIBRARY: CODEX EGBERTI.



*Fig. 10*—MODENA, CATHEDRAL: STORY OF GENESIS.